

claiming citizenship

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

In this issue

Values and meanings of citizenship

Spaces for change?

Making accountability count

Citizens and science

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DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
Citizenship, Participation and Accountability



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Building inclusive citizenship and democracies

Editorial

Many citizens are disillusioned with government and democracy. Corruption, state failures to respond to poor people's needs and a lack of connection between citizens and elected representatives and bureaucrats are major concerns. At the same time, citizens are challenging corporations and global institutions to be more responsible.

Accountability is now a key issue in development. Greater accountability from governments, donors and other institutions is expected to allow aid to reach the people for whom it is intended. Donors have been mostly interested in supporting the ability of states to provide basic services – primary health, education, water, sanitation, roads and bridges.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness aims to channel donor funding directly to governments through general budget support, encouraging partner countries to exercise leadership and coordination over their own development strategies and policies. While this is important, donors give little consideration to the role of citizens in building the state and a more inclusive democracy.

Accountability, rather than being a bureaucratic or legal term, is about improving democratic processes, challenging power and claiming citizenship. It is best claimed from below by citizens themselves, rather than only being provided by the state. Supporting citizen-led initiatives is important as they address accountability failures in very direct ways.

A focus on active and empowered citizens who can participate in decision-making, claim rights and hold institutions accountable is at the centre of the

work of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC). This issue of *id21 focus* presents articles and case-studies based on the DRC's key research themes (See box on Page 2).

The Citizenship DRC's work shows important connections and relationships between effective states and empowered citizens. The programme asks:

- What are the roles of citizens and civil society in building effective states and more inclusive democracy?
- Where can ordinary people have a voice and try to influence important decisions and policies that affect their lives?
- How can people hold governments or corporations accountable?
- How can these institutions become more responsive to the needs of poor people?

Researchers in this programme use the term citizenship in several ways, depending on the countries and context they are studying and on diverse theoretical perspectives. However, the fundamental approach – 'seeing like a citizen' – starts with the perceptions of citizens themselves and asks how they interact and

Women who live in the urban slums of Veracruz in Mexico, blocking a highway in protest against lack of basic services such as water and electricity. Direct collective action is one strategy that citizens use to get access to their rights and increase accountability.
Citizenship DRC, 2004



- ▶ view the institutions from which they are expected to benefit.

People's understanding and action

Although personal experiences vary by country and context, many people share common values and ideas of citizenship. In some places, people see themselves as citizens in relation to their local community or neighbourhood, rather than a state that may fail to provide services or include them in decision-making. This is a challenge in trying to build effective states with 'empowered' citizens. This could, however, also help in assessing efforts towards building states. For example, when poor citizens start to identify the state in their idea of citizenship, they may have begun to see the state as a potentially reliable and fair provider of rights and services.

Citizens who are active and empowered emerge gradually through local-level action around livelihoods, access to services and so on. Later (sometimes a generation later), people may gain the independence and knowledge to interact with state level processes. This implies that decades of support to 'participation' and to forms of local action, are likely to have had a positive, long-term, state building function. This is especially true if projects also provide opportunities for people to learn about their rights and gain skills that enable them to claim their rights.

Citizens interact with the state through a variety of means in addition to voting for



or lobbying elected representatives. State-initiated forums, such as health councils in Brazil, can have the potential for citizens to get involved in debates about public policy from local to national level. Other means through which citizens and states interact include non-government organisations and local associations, such as garment workers

Citizens participate in a health conference in Brazil. Forums created by the state enable participants to voice their views to influence policy at a local or national level. *Citizenship DRC, 2005*

in Bangladesh and self-organised social movements, such as HIV and AIDS activists in South Africa.

Building inclusive citizenship and democracy is a long term effort requiring sustained commitment and support over years if not decades. The main conclusions from the Citizenship DRC's research include:

- People claim citizenship and rights through their own actions. Better-informed people who understand their rights and claim them through collective action and political processes make an important contribution to building effective states.
- Citizens, especially poor people, need support to develop their understanding of citizenship in relation to the state and other institutions and to gain skills to participate and claim rights.
- Improving accountability means the state needs to increase its capacity to respond to the claims of citizens. Citizen participation in local development and service delivery results not only in better services, but can also serve as a learning ground for new forms of cooperation between state officials, politicians and citizens.

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See also

Taking a Citizen's Perspective: Building Effective States, by Rosalind Eyben and Sarah Ladbury, 2006 (PDF)
www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/drc_general/Report/drcCitizensperspective.pdf

Triumph, Deficit or Contestation? Deepening the 'Deepening Democracy' Debate, IDS Working Paper 264, IDS, by John Gaventa, 2006 (PDF)
www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/deepening_democracy/gaventawp264.pdf

What is the Citizenship DRC?

The Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Accountability and Participation (Citizenship DRC) is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and coordinated at the Institute of Development Studies. It works with institutions in Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa, and with researchers in Argentina, Jamaica, Canada and the UK. From 2000 to 2005, the research focused on four themes:

- poor people's perceptions and experiences of rights and citizenship
- accountability within civil society and the corporate sector
- issues of participation, deliberation, inclusion and citizen voice in influencing policy
- how citizens mobilise to claim rights around knowledge and expertise around science.

Research themes for 2006 to 2011 include: deepening democracy in states and local communities; violence, citizenship and participation; and citizen engagement in a globalising world. For more details see: www.drc-citizenship.org

Partners in the Citizenship DRC

Ação para Desenvolvimento Rural e Ambiente (ADRA), Angola
www.adra-angola.org/cms

BRAC University, Bangladesh
www.bracuniversity.net

Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP), Brazil
www.cebrap.org.br/index.asp

Society for Participatory Research (PRIA), India
www.pria.org/cgi-bin/index.htm

Theatre for Development Centre, Ahmadu Bello University (TFDC/ABU), Nigeria
www.drc-citizenship.org/About_us/tfdc.htm

Centre for Southern African Studies
University of the Western Cape (CSAS/UWC), South Africa
www.uwc.ac.za/ems/sog/CSAS

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Values and meanings of citizenship

What does citizenship mean to poor and socially excluded people? How do their views help us understand and analyse what 'inclusive' citizenship means?

The history of citizenship is largely of struggle over how it is defined and who is included. Today, the views of 'ordinary' citizens are absent in theoretical debates. The Citizenship DRC worked with local community groups in Brazil, Britain, Bangladesh, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru and South Africa to examine what citizenship means to people, particularly those whose status as citizens is either non-existent (because the government refuses to recognise their rights) or extremely uncertain.

Findings show that experiences of citizenship vary by context and the nature of exclusion, but there are common values. Although not universal, these values are widespread enough to suggest that they are a significant aspect of how people connect with each other and organise themselves collectively.

People living in illegal housing settlements (*favelas*) in Brazil, landless women in Bangladesh, indigenous groups in Mexico and housing tenants in Kenya have all experienced exclusion in some form. Their vision of a more inclusive society includes the following values: justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity.

Justice

This is about when it is fair to treat people the same and when it is fair to treat them differently. For example, citizens in Nigeria prioritised ethnicity as the basis for their identity and primary affiliation. But they expected the state and its representatives to act fairly and impartially to all citizens and protested when citizens were discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity.

Recognition

This refers to people's right as human beings to be recognised, whether their identity or culture conforms to dominant expectations or not. The 'right to have rights' was at the heart of the Zapatista struggle in Mexico, when indigenous people demanded the right to be different from mainstream society. Dignity and respect are essential to the idea of citizenship in the less visible and more daily moments of life. In Brazil's *favelas*, people experienced a lack of citizenship by having no dignity in their everyday interactions with others because of negative stereotyping in wider society.

Self-determination

People's ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives is self-determination. The struggle for rights is expressed in ways that reflect the experiences of people who have been denied self-determination. Naripokkho, a Bangladeshi organisation works with women and their right to self-

Theatre helps explore citizenship

Nigerians can explore their ideas of identity and citizenship through theatre. Songs, stories, dance and dialogue drawn from their everyday life help them with this.

Researchers from the Theatre for Development Centre in Nigeria used a combination of theatre, participatory learning and action, and interviews which built on notions of 'conversations'. They held 'conversations' about citizenship, entitlements and exclusion which gave several Nigerians the space to reflect and communicate concerns.

Community members assessed where they stood in relation to members of other communities, local government and the state.

The researchers found:

- Citizens in Nigeria told stories of frustration about their identities in relation to geographical location, ethnicity, religion and gender: the country's colonial past has exacerbated these feelings.
- Citizens say that according to the

constitution, citizenship is determined by ancestry and by being born in Nigeria. In practice, however, Nigerians insist on ancestry as the true and recognisable form of citizenship.

Researchers discussed solutions for problems with identity and citizen participation with community members. They found people see the crisis within a larger frame of politics: many believed political leaders were manipulating ethnicity and religion for political reasons. They see good governance (principles and practices that neither played on nor emphasised ethnicity and religion) as the route to citizenship rights.

This was a challenge for the research as it raised some important questions to explore further:

- Is ethnic identity so strong in Nigerians, that it prevents a common sense of nationhood?
- Has the state failed to promote principles of citizenship independent of ethnic identities?

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See also

'A nation in search of citizens: Problems of citizenship in the Nigerian context' by Oga Steve Abah and Jenkeri Okwori, in *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*, Zed Books: London, edited by Naila Kabeer, 2005

Geographies of citizenship in Nigeria, Tamaza Publishing Company for Theatre for Development Centre, Ahmadu Bello University: Zaria, edited by Oga Steve Abah, 2005

Theatre and drama were useful tools to find out people's ideas of citizenship. Several Nigerians showed a greater affinity to their ethnicity or religion than they did towards the nation. *Citizenship DRC, 2005*



determination. They challenge gender inequality in access to resources such as education, property, jobs and health care. They also challenge patriarchal power exercised through various forms of control over women's bodies.

Solidarity

This is the capacity to identify with other people and to act in unity with them for justice and recognition. This takes various forms, based on the included or excluded status of individuals and groups. It depends on the extent to which people hope to overcome their excluded status. For those who do not have much hope or experience of solidarity, this is limited to daily struggles in the community, to family or next of kin. In South Africa, for example, an

elderly black man said he wanted support, not welfare from the state and expressed solidarity with his immediate community. Solidarity can also take more overtly political forms such as the struggle of the Zapatistas in Mexico to claim their place in the nation's history.

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www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/meanings_and_expressions/Zed_Book/Kabeer01.pdf

Spaces for change?

Governance reforms in some countries have encouraged government officials to meet with citizens in formal meeting places to help make decisions at local and national levels. Citizens are increasingly able to participate in meetings, exchange information and negotiate agendas with state officials on issues concerning them.

What actually happens when people participate? Does the creation of 'spaces' for citizen participation mean that setting priorities on health, education or natural resource management for example, becomes more democratic? Are citizens more able to hold their government to account by attending and participating in these meetings?

Researchers from the Citizenship DRC see great potential for revitalising democracy and creating new forms of citizenship, but argue that simply creating and designing participatory spaces is not enough. Social inequalities, discrimination and power relationships in wider society are often reproduced on a smaller scale. For example, the culture and design of health facilities boards in South Africa maintain the dominance and power of white South

Africans, as they did in the Apartheid era.

Creating participatory spaces does not mean that all people can participate equally. In Bangladesh, community groups were created as part of health sector reforms, but the poorest people were silent in meetings which meant that existing social differences were reproduced.

Researchers also find that participation can be guided by stereotyped expectations. In rural India, there are 'empty spaces' in local governance and watershed management where women rarely participate, yet women-only health groups are very active. There are few opportunities for women to learn the skills they need to participate effectively.

Who participates and with what legitimacy? In Sao Paulo, Brazil, citizen participation usually refers to the hundreds of registered civil society organisations, who advocate on behalf of others, rather than individuals finding their own political voice. In Bangladesh, community groups managing village-level health services tend



Women march in Brazil demanding for people's participation in health care policy decisions.

Citizenship DRC, 2005

to be elite groups of professionals, teachers and wealthy farmers appointed by local government chairmen.

Clearly, there are considerable challenges to effective citizen participation and deeper forms of democracy. Yet, there are slow but real shifts in people's political awareness as citizens and a growing sense of entitlement to participate.

There are complex interactions between getting the design of participatory spaces in governance right and stimulating participation 'from below'.

- People need to see themselves as citizens with rights and responsibilities rather than as beneficiaries or clients.
- There are tensions around those who represent themselves as individuals and others who are nominated or elected representatives of neighbourhood and community organisations, or members of trade unions. They all have different sources of legitimacy to speak and act.
- It is important to understand who attends these meetings, with what authority, and what 'participation' means to them.
- Different cultural, social and historical experiences affect how people perceive participatory governance.
- Government officials and the state have a responsibility to make sure that discrimination is not reproduced in participatory spaces, and that all sections of society are able to participate.

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Spaces for Change? The Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas, Zed Books: London, edited by Andrea Cornwall and Vera Schattan Coelho, 2007 (PDF)
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case study

Giving people a space in Brazil's health councils

Brazil's system of health councils and conferences offers inspiring lessons. Thousands of Brazilian citizens, representing churches, women's associations, unions and community groups, meet every month with people who provide health care.

Individuals and groups come together with health worker delegates in municipal health conferences every two or four years. Chosen delegates from civil society then attend a national level conference. Good ideas can find a place and take form in policy proposals that are debated, contested and refined as they move up from municipal to national level.

Is participation in health councils monopolised by groups having political ties with public health managers? Could the participation of particular groups be linked to the way that meetings are designed, how the participatory process is managed and how civil society groups act?

Research carried out in 31 local health councils in São Paulo looks at whether people from all sections of civil society are fairly represented.

Findings show that:

- Fifty percent of the seats in the health councils are reserved for civil society. The rest are divided equally between

service providers and public officials: this distribution gives a better opportunity for citizens and civil society organisations to voice their views.

- The selection process of the councillors varies from council to council, but the more open and transparent the selection process, the more inclusive the council.
- Inclusive measures include making information on the election process available, listing all the associations and movements in the region, using radio or newspapers to publicise elections, granting candidatures to individuals as well as organisations.
- Discussion techniques are used to help groups to communicate and express themselves better. Some civil society groups have less information and communication material, and find participatory techniques help them articulate their demands better.

While the system is not perfect, it does show that if the conditions are right, participation can be effective and democracy can be strengthened.

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Making accountability count

Accountability is fundamentally a relationship of power. When accountability mechanisms work, citizens are able to make demands on powerful institutions and ensure that those demands are met. Accountability is therefore about democracy, rights and citizenship.

Good governance, which is primarily concerned with building effective states, has tended to appropriate the idea of accountability to mean a legal relationship, without acknowledging the social relationships that underpin it. This does not match with the politics and practices of accountability as poor people experience it.

The Citizenship DRC's research looks at different strategies citizens use to demand accountability and asks: accountability for what and for whom? It focuses on demands for accountability around access to resources by people in deprived communities in India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria and Mexico.

The challenges of demanding accountability differ according to whether the struggle is for rights to resources, to environmental protection or to welfare (health and housing). How central a resource is to a country's economy or how important the country is in the global market place can have a bearing on which accountability mechanism can be used and who can use it.

Conflict and negotiation

A common feature across the countries studied is the cycle of conflict and negotiation that emerges in struggles for accountability. Which accountability strategies work, when, why and for whom?

In Nigeria, communities made short-term demands to oil companies for concessions and saw increased flows of capital into a village. But oil companies reinforced and made worse internal divisions within communities by giving financial help to elite groups. This increased the conflict, rather than addressing the fundamental rights violations in the Niger Delta. Short term concessions therefore can be a poor substitute for longer term political reforms.

Combined strategies

The research focuses on formal and informal strategies for accountability such as taking legal action, street protests and using the media. It explores the potential for positive outcomes for poor people when strategies are combined.

In Mombasa, Kenya, council tenants demanded decent housing conditions, secure tenure, functioning urban services and an end to the grabbing of public land. Formally, they drew on the United Nations Convention on Human Rights. Informally, they mobilised residents, blocked illegal construction and gained media attention. With this combined strategy they managed to prevent well-connected business interests from further encroaching upon their land. However, over ten years of struggle, policy at local or

national level did not change. Neither did it bring about concrete changes in the practices and procedures of the Housing Development Department in Kenya.

Lessons from the research:

- Technocratic understandings and definitions of accountability overlook power inequalities and reduce the likelihood of challenging decisions that affect poor people adversely.
- Accountability works best when it is claimed by citizens and is for a broader social or economic good.
- Legal provisions and legally protected rights are important but their reach is limited: law can bring about changes in society but equally social changes can transform law too.
- Promoting accountability is political: reforms in accountability challenge powerful interests that often benefit from not being transparent or responding to citizens' claims for their rights.

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See also

Rights, Resources and the Politics of Accountability, Zed Books: London, edited by Peter Newell and Joanna Wheeler, 2006 (PDF)
www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/accountability/Chapters_in_Book/Newellwheelerintro.pdf

case study

Making the Bangladeshi garment industry accountable

The garment industry in Bangladesh is a combination of the export and domestic sectors. Accountability in the export sector is associated with universal codes of conduct driven by companies' concerns about reputation. The domestic sector contains more genuine seeds of a democratic culture of accountability.

Export sector

Consumer awareness campaigns have highlighted the long hours, no contracts, salary payment delays and violations of health and safety standards that Bangladeshi export garment workers face. As a result, international buyers imposed codes of conduct on working conditions to avoid bad publicity.

Failure to comply with basic labour standards now carries real penalties for the garment manufacturers, as international buyers take away their orders. The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies examined whether the 'culture of compliance' has contributed to the

growth of a culture of accountability.

Conditions improved for the workers in factories that dealt with foreign buyers. However, there were few significant changes and many employers tried to evade their responsibilities, except for the most visible aspects of the codes of conduct. Also, this compliance to international standards is different to compliance with national labour laws drawn up by the state, which set out the rights of all Bangladeshi citizens.

Codes of conduct do not necessarily lead to genuine accountability:

- Although there is evidence of greater compliance with codes, it is due to the companies' vulnerability in the international buyer-driven value chain, rather than a genuine value of accountability.
- International brand name companies are more concerned about their reputation than with the needs of workers.

Domestic sector

Most garment workers, many of them women, work informally and outside the export sector, beyond the reach of international buyers and codes of conduct. These workers have little strategic importance because they do not earn the country's foreign exchange. Nevertheless,

the domestic sector employs the majority of poor working people.

It is here that the seeds of a genuine culture of democratic accountability can be found, but it is still early to see significant changes in accountability practices:

- There is a new growth in labour organisation to support the needs of the most vulnerable people. Garment workers, however, have little faith in the trade unions. The activities of the government and organisations prepared to represent their particular interests are more relevant to this set of workers.
- Although workers are still largely unaware of their rights, they are less willing to tolerate injustice in the workplace. There are more visible signs of reaction, such as shop floor protests, walk outs and street protests over minimum wages. Women participate in these processes though they rarely have leadership roles.

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Citizens and science

Whose knowledge counts?

Science and technology development have major implications for tackling poverty and promoting well-being in developing countries. Recent controversies, such as genetically modified food crops and AIDS drugs, have created new dimensions and needs for public involvement in decision-making.

Some questions that the Citizenship DRC sought to answer include:

- How can citizens get involved in scientific debates and policy processes to address what social purposes they serve?
- How can people ensure their concerns are at the heart of scientific decisions, and have faith that the institutions and political powers are making the best choices?
- What are their rights?
- Who is accountable to whom?

Science and technology is generally associated with highly specialised, professional knowledge and expertise that usually exclude ordinary citizens. This makes it difficult for citizens to participate. But science and technology links local issues with global developments. In a globalising world, poor people's needs and perspectives can be misrepresented and lead to culturally unacceptable technological developments, or missed opportunities in local communities.

Research from: Brazil, Britain, China, India, New Zealand, South Africa and Zimbabwe shows many cases where citizens have been active. People have acted based on their own knowledge, while being linked to their own identities and cultures and intertwined with global networks and solidarities. Individuals and groups have questioned experts, demanded evidence and asserted their own knowledge and claims.

Opportunities to do this, however, vary depending on many factors including income, access to education and the extent to which people organise themselves, have good networks and adequate resources:

- Activist groups and non-governmental organisations in Mumbai, India, mobilised textile workers to get government regulators and courts of law to recognise and act on their concerns on occupational health issues. Worker unions and groups collected information on occupational health issues which led to a long campaign around lung diseases created by dust emissions.

case study

AIDS activists in South Africa

The complex HIV and AIDS situation in South Africa has provoked an extraordinary response from citizens and civil society.

High profile figures such as the President and a health minister have held dissident scientific perspectives on the HIV virus and promoted 'indigenous knowledge' and 'local solutions' as part of a cultural nationalist programme. This led people to distrust the scientific establishment. Combined with popular myths, stigma and shame around HIV and AIDS, it had a devastating impact on public health interventions.

Research from the University of Western Cape looks at the Treatment Action Campaign's (TAC) strategies to get access to life-saving drugs for poor people, in a context where scientific authority was distrusted by powerful people and large sections of the public. TAC interacted with scientists, the media, the legal system, non-government organisations and the government. Its main strategy, however, was to mobilise support in schools and poor communities through HIV and AIDS treatment literacy and awareness campaigns. TAC widely publicised

their victories over the South African government and multinational pharmaceutical companies.

TAC draws on a rights-based approach asserting the right of citizens to scientific knowledge, treatment information and the latest research findings. In addition to accessing medical treatment, TAC is concerned with creating 'empowered citizens' who understand the connection between biomedicine, the wider social world and the political economy of health. However, there is a lot still to be done. A major challenge now is how to make this widespread so that poor working class citizens are empowered and responsible in their approach to HIV and AIDS, treatment and health care.

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See also

From 'Medical Miracles' to Normal(ised) Medicine: Aids Treatment, Activism and Citizenship in the UK And South Africa, IDS Working Paper 252, by Steven Robins, 2005 (PDF) www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/citizens_and_science/WP/wp252.pdf

'AIDS, Science and Citizenship after Apartheid' by Steven Robins, 2005, in *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*, Zed Books: London, edited by Naila Kabeer, 2005

- When 'golden rice', a genetically modified seed which it is claimed would help overcome vitamin A deficiency, was introduced in India, a people's movement raised questions: its impact on the environment, nutritional benefits and the motivations behind the intentions of private companies selling it were serious concerns.

Public involvement with science is usually dominated by narrow technical debates that involve the public only to promote acceptance or deflect controversy over a particular issue. Science and technology debates need to open up participation and deliberation, not close them down.

- Policy thinking needs to cover broader questions about how science and technology agendas are framed, the social purposes they serve and who stands to gain or lose.
- Participatory approaches that involve citizens in setting research agendas and promote combined local and scientific knowledge are important.

- Learning alliances and networks, and linking innovation with delivery systems to meet poor people's needs require investment.
- These approaches need to work in combination with citizen action – through the media, internet, public protest and challenges through the courts.

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See also

Science and Citizens: Globalisation and the Challenge of Engagement, edited by Melissa Leach, Ian Scoones and Brian Wynne, Zed Books: London, March 2005 (PDF) www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/citizens_and_science/Zed_Book/1.pdf

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